

Northeast Montana Weather Summary for the Spring of 2006

March had near normal temperatures and precipitation. The month started off on the cold side the first week of the month, and ended with above normal temperatures the last week of the month. Temperatures were close to normal the remainder of the month. The coldest temperature was observed at Westby on the 14th, with a low of 5 below. Flatwillow had the warmest reading of the month, with a high of 71 on the 28th. The last zero degree reading of the winter was observed on the morning of the 15th, with a low temperature of 4 below at Westby. Content had the most precipitation during the month, with 1.75 inches. Saco 1NW was the dry spot for the month with only a tenth of an inch of precipitation. Most of the snowfall was observed with a storm system around the middle of the month (see below). Locally heavy snow fell on the 4th across southern Phillips county and Petroleum counties where 4 to 7 inches of snow was observed along with thundersnow.

The most significant weather event occurred March 18th through the 20th. A storm system slowly tracked from the Great Basin into the Central Plains. Snowfall amounts ranged from 2 to 8 inches, with the greatest snowfall observed along the North Dakota Border. The snow was accompanied by strong east to southeast wind of 20 to 40 mph with stronger gusts, which produced considerable blowing and drifting snow. The blowing and drifting snow lasted for 36 to 48 hours, and caused a prolonged period of reduced visibility and poor road conditions due to the extensive drifting. Blizzard conditions were reported with this storm at times in Wibaux and Richland Counties, and across the Big Sheep Mountains.

April had both above average temperatures and precipitation. The month started off with well above normal temperatures through the middle of the month. The second half of the month featured shorter alternating spells of above and below average temperatures. The coldest temperature was observed at both Scobey 4NW and Redstone on the 3rd, with a low of 15 degrees. Redstone also reported a low of 15 on the 6th. Savage had the warmest reading of the month, with a high of 83 on both the 15th and 16th of the month. The heaviest precipitation totals occurred across the eastern half of the area, with much of the precipitation occurring on the 18th and 19th. Carlyle 13NW had the most precipitation with 5.75 inches. Precipitation totals were less across Valley, Phillips & Petroleum counties where many areas recorded less than 2 inches of precipitation. Dodson 2WNW, Glasgow, and Nashua tied as the dry spots for the month with only 1.16 inches.

The most significant weather event of the month was a spring blizzard from the morning of the 18th until mid-morning on the 19th. An area of low pressure developed in Wyoming and moved out into the western Dakotas. A heavy wet snow fell across the extreme eastern Montana, and combined with a north wind of 30 to 50 mph with gusts to 70 mph to produce blizzard conditions. The heaviest snow fell across the Big Sheep Mountains and in Wibaux County where 12 to 17 inches of heavy wet snow fell. 9NW Wibaux reported 17 inches of snow and 10N Lindsay in the Big Sheep Mountains reported 10 inches of snow with drifts 4 to 5 feet deep. The snowfall was highly elevation dependent, and the highest snowfall totals were observed across the higher terrain.

Interstate 94 was closed from Glendive to the North Dakota border during the height of the storm, and many roads in Wibaux County were closed or open to emergency travel only. 3 Semi-trucks and 1 car were stranded on Highway 200 25 miles west-northwest of Glendive in the Big Sheep Mountains. The snow was reported to be 1 foot deep with visibility of 50 feet at the time. The strong wind knocked out power across portions of Daniels, Dawson, Prairie and Wibaux Counties.

May was a bit warmer than normal. Precipitation varied quite a bit across the area, with some areas observing above normal precipitation and others below. Terry had the most precipitation with 4.02 inches. Scobey 4NW was the dry spot with only 63 hundredths of an inch. The first half of the month got off to a dry start, with frequent showers and thunderstorms the second half of the month. Most areas had little or no snow, with many observing stations reporting a trace of snow during the first few days of the month. The coldest temperature was observed at Opheim 10N with a low temperature of 18 on the morning of the 11th. No temperatures below freezing were observed after the 15th of the month when Redstone had a low of 29. Culbertson had the warmest reading of the month with a high of 96 on the 18th. Many locations across northeast Montana had their first 90 degree day of the year on the 18th.

The most significant event of the month occurred on the evening of the 23rd. Severe thunderstorms affected portions of Daniels, Roosevelt, and Dawson counties with large hail. A wind gust to 77 mph was observed 2 miles west of Bloomfield in Dawson County. The thunderstorms were accompanied by torrential downpours, and flash flooding was observed in Valley, Prairie, and McCone counties. Early on the morning of the 24th a thunderstorm produced between 4 and 7 inches of rain in Brockton.